



STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE **A STRATEGIC AGENDA FOR ACTION**

DGP-NET LESSONS LEARNED SERIES



Democratic Governance Practice Network (DGP-Net)

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ABOUT DGP-NET

UNDP draws on the Democratic Governance Practice Network (dgp-net@groups.undp.org), a global network of democratic governance practitioners to provide timely and high-quality advice, expertise and know-how to policy makers and other partners in the countries where we operate - helping them pursue the best possible development solutions. The DGP-Net promotes local, national, regional and global knowledge creation, sharing and application. It works as a global exchange forum to inform more than 2000 practice members of the new and upcoming practice initiatives, innovations, and, knowledge resources available within UNDP's Democratic Governance Community of Practice, and as a tool for sharing comparative experiences, good practices, lessons learned, and discussion of substantive issues related to governance. UNDP also supported the establishment of partners' networks based on the UNDP model through the DGP-Net.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (CoP): A STRATEGIC AGENDA FOR ACTION

Knowledge management has become a strategic growth area; helping in building synergies and increased knowledge and information sharing. The UNDP Strategic Plan (2008-11) included specific knowledge management related outputs, indicators and targets for the first time. Arguably Networks and Communities of Practice are now the primary mechanism for moving knowledge and learning across traditional boundaries in global organisations like UNDP. This rise of Communities of Practice (CoP) to prominence has no doubt arisen from the need for UNDP to adapt to the increasingly fast changing environment it operates in where the need to transfer learning from day to day practices in country offices in order to enhance development effectiveness.

These communities, operating at country, regional and global levels have enabled teams of UNDP staff to interact closely in the development of new tools and methodologies to support UNDP work after extensive peer reviews and analysis of comparative experiences. UNDP now has over 20 global virtual networks with about 8,000 subscribers allowing real time discussion on key issues and sharing of experiences across the globe. The presence of such powerful knowledge and practice networks contributes directly to the growth and sustenance of CoPs.

From bottom-up policy development process to top-down policy agenda setting, there has been a stronger tendency in UNDP to involve and/or consult relevant members of the CoP. A consistent effort to give to the regional and sub-regional CoPs a meaningful role in identifying, designing and implementing regional programmatic initiatives has also been noted. Communities focus on practical aspects of a practice, everyday problem, development in the practice and/or thematic area, new tools, things that work and don't (lessons learned), good practices etc.

The value of CoPs should be measured by the usefulness they bring to practitioners in their work and their ultimate development impact. Of course, value can be added to the CoPs through a host of

activities, including Face to Face (F2F) meetings, support missions, study tours, virtual discussion forums, mutual support initiative, innovation fund, participation fund, fellowship, intensive CO-to-CO support, e-discussion, formal training, resource mobilization, etc.). The present guidance note attempts to identify some of the lessons learned and good practices to strengthen the CoP processes.

An integrated plan of action is required with some quick wins that can deliver more immediate benefits (e.g. address specific suggestions shared by CoP members for improvements in products and services). Other issues such as sponsor engagement and helping to make sure networks address business issues will take more time and work to engage senior management. While the Guidance Note identified different ways communities could impact individuals and organisations (e.g. increasing learning and knowledge sharing or motivation and commitment for members), several factors in the guidelines also focus on one of the dimensions of individual and organisational impact: increased performance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term 'Communities of Practice (CoP)' was first used in 1991 by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger who used it in relation to situated learning as part of an attempt to "rethink learning" at the Institute for Research on Learning. In 1998, the theorist Etienne Wenger extended the concept and applied it to other contexts, including organisational development settings. He described CoPs in terms of the interplay of four fundamental dualities: participation vs reification, designed vs emergent, identification vs negotiability and local vs global although, possibly because of the possible link to Knowledge Management, the participation vs reification duality has been the focus of most interest. More recently and increasingly, Communities of Practice have become associated with knowledge management as people have begun to see them as ways of developing social capital, nurturing new knowledge, stimulating innovation, or sharing existing tacit knowledge within an organisation. It is now an accepted part of organisational development (OD).¹

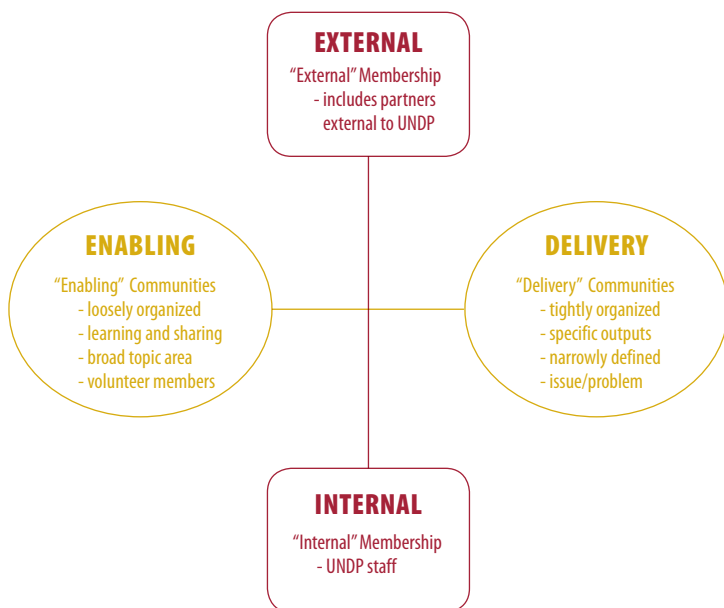
The notion of Community of Practice is increasingly gaining currency in day-to-day UNDP practice work. From bottom-up policy development process to top-down policy agenda setting, there has been a stronger tendency to involve and/or consult members of the relevant CoP. A consistent effort to give to the regional and sub-regional CoPs a meaningful role in identifying, designing and implementing regional programmatic initiatives has also been noted. Communities focus on practical aspects of a practice, everyday problem, development in the practice and/or thematic area, new tools, things that work and don't (lessons learned), good practices etc.

¹ Further information on the evolution of the concept of Communities of Practice can be found in the introduction to Hildreth and Kimble's book, available at: <http://www.chris-kimble.com/KNICoP/Chapters/Introduction.html>

TYPES

CoPs can be placed on a range starting with loosely organized limited goal CoPs to highly structured task and output oriented CoPs. We can tag one side of the continuum 'Enabling Communities' (loosely organized around goals limited to promoting learning and knowledge sharing) and the other side as 'Delivery Communities' (tightly organised to deliver specific outputs). CoPs which belong on the 'enabling end' of the range' will most probably address broad themes (e.g. access to justice, trade); whereas delivery communities may link to more narrowly defined problems/issues. Within service lines, themes are typically limited by geography (e.g. improving access to justice in sub-Saharan Africa) and/or sub-theme (e.g. tackling governance of climate challenges). CoPs can be internal (UNDP staff only) and external (membership includes partners, experts external to UNDP).

TYPES OF CoPs



VALUE OF COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Communities of Practice offer a collaborative structure that has proven to be extremely effective in the creation and transfer of knowledge within organisations. Communities provide value to organisations in the following ways:

- Facilitate the rapid identification of individuals with specific knowledge or skills;
- Foster knowledge sharing across organisational boundaries ("boundary spanning");
- Promote and facilitate the capture and re-use of existing knowledge assets and retention of organisational memory;
- Provide a safe environment to share problems and challenges and test new ideas;
- Facilitate collaboration across different time zones;
- Foster innovation (within and across organisational boundaries);
- Facilitate faster, better-informed decision making;
- Reduce learning curves for new employees;
- Improve the quality of products developed;
- Foster interaction between new/more junior employees and senior/more experienced practitioners;
- Promote a broader organisational perspective among employees, providing a better understanding of how individual tasks fit into the larger organisational picture.

The value of CoPs should be measured by the usefulness they bring to practitioners in their work and their ultimate development impact. Of course, value can be added to the CoPs through a host of activities, including Face to Face (F2F) meetings, support missions, study tours, virtual discussion forums, mutual support initiative, innovation fund, participation fund, fellowship, intensive CO-to-CO support, e-discussion formal training, resource mobilization, etc.). The present guidance note attempts to identify some of the lessons learned and good practices to be added to CoP processes.

II. OBJECTIVES

The UNDP Strategic Plan (2008-11) incorporated specific knowledge management related outputs, indicators and targets. Arguably Networks and Communities of Practice are now the primary mechanism for moving knowledge and learning across traditional boundaries in global organisations like UNDP. The principal objective of this strategic agenda is to offer a set of practical recommendations based on lessons learned for Community of Practice strengthening process. The note looked into the state of existing follow-up process of the past practice/sub-practice strengthening initiatives including Face to Face (F2F) meetings. It also assessed the efficacy of such follow-up process. This will be particularly helpful for the BDP alignment and the regionalisation strategy for regional bureaus and service centers.



III. PROCESS

The present guidance note analysed selected documentation of past global CoP meetings including relevant outputs of some of the regional and thematic/sub-practice CoP meetings. The earlier version generated a number of useful comments and/or feedback from practitioners including several members of the Democratic Governance Group (DGG-Global) and Knowledge Sharing Team (KST-HQ/BDP). The KST-HQ also discussed this briefly in one of its weekly meetings.

A brief set of questionnaires was sent to the DGG-Global mailing group. The request received eight detailed responses from different regions. The present paper also looked into the DGP-Net responses received in relation to:

1. For Comments: Follow-up to Anti-Corruption CoP Initiative (June 2007)
2. E-discussion 'Towards a Local Governance and Development Agenda: Lessons and Challenges' (27 August-16 October 2007)
3. Reports of the previous CoP (global, regional, thematic, cross-practice) Meetings and Initiatives

An earlier version of the paper was circulated in DGG-Global, DGG-HQ including Oslo Governance Center (OGC), KST-Global, and KST-HQ mailing list members to generate specific feedback on the draft to incorporate into the present version. The DGG Staff meeting discussed the draft in greater details on 30 April 2008 and endorsed the note in principle.

IV. REVISITING CORPORATE EXPECTATIONS OF COMMUNITIES

Communities of Practice are ideal vehicles for leveraging tacit knowledge because they enable person-to-person interaction and engage a whole group in advancing their field of practice. As a result, they can spread the insights from that collaborative thinking across the whole organisation. CoPs should be a response to an identified niche where both the organisation and individual members can benefit from focused learning and product delivery. It is also important to determine the appropriateness of a specific CoP. The following factors could be considered:

- When there are dispersed and varied experiences and knowledge (e.g. there is a large potential for learning among members)
- In accordance with UNDP Strategic Plan service areas and drivers or when a common priority emerges where UNDP can apply its skills/learning to 'fill a gap' /niche
- When the motivation resources and expertise are sufficient
- When there is management support

Clearly stated goals and targets also correlate highly with the value communities create for the organisation. Community goals are typically developed in collaboration with the community sponsor or governance group and/or core community members. In one organisation, community goals cascade down to communities through the management structure. In another organisation, goals are set in by the core members and fed up to a steering group.

However, there is a somewhat unchecked expectation and reliance on what CoPs can realistically deliver, particularly CoPs of UNDP's type, which are quite large, often also include selected members from outside the organisation. In most companies and organisations, CoPs tend to be either very internal and closed for staff only, where the focus really is on sharing of experience, peer-to-peer support, staff capacity development, team building, advancing the practice, etc. or they are open to external members but the focus is so specific and tight that the community identity is very strong and the members already know one another through previous contact or by reputation. With global lists of practitioners and staff such as those in UNDP, the focus is

quite wide; often it becomes somewhat difficult to address very specific and/or unique needs/demands of members with regional dimension. This said, there is no doubt a great deal of value-added for the global CoPs, but it should register that its strength really is in being a global forum for practitioners to link with one another if they so wish and to seek input to their queries when they have one.

1. CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL-REGIONAL CoP RELATIONS

It remains somewhat unclear to what extent global CoPs are influencing regional programmes, impacting policy, developing capacity in a way that will enable the members to become more effective in their role in a sustained and continuous fashion, especially if we all acknowledge that developing any kind of capacity requires real investment in time, effort, resources, commitment, and an effective skill enhancing approach. For example, while the global poverty network is useful for the purpose above, it cannot possibly build sufficient capacity for staff not trained as economists to even begin diagnosing problems, dialoguing with the government (or the World Bank for that matter), design effective programmes or even judge whether advice offered by a policy advisor or consultant on economic issues is sound. This puts a great deal of pressure on the facilitators to transform CoPs with the dedicated help of the networks into effective process and/or mechanism to address issues that may be better addressed through some other means.

2. BDP ALIGNMENT AND REGIONALISATION

In line with the corporate approach, BDP has prepared for its alignment process by engaging in the corporate decision-making processes, especially through its intensive contributions to helping shape UNDP's Strategic Plan (2008 – 2011). Accordingly, BDP has initiated its alignment process in concert with corporate developments but has also used the opportunity to re-evaluate its overall vision, the strength of its position as the primary provider of advisory services in UNDP, and what specific alignments at the process-, structural-, and resource-levels will help BDP achieve its vision.

As such, the BDP alignment process has provided an opportunity to revisit the utilization of the Practice Architecture as well as facilitate the identification of changes needed to strengthen UNDP's ability to leverage its global capacities, not least by improving the advice and support made available to UNDP's country offices. The prevailing guiding principles 'that shape how BDP is strengthening its positioning' reflect the overall rationale for change and vision for BDP.

They are:

- **Corporate coherence:** Shared structures and processes across organisation
- **Policy and programme consistency:** Consistency in advice on policy and programme matters
- **Client and service orientation:** Timely quality services responding to client needs/demands
- **Accountability:** Clarity on roles and responsibilities and results-based management

In view of the ongoing BDP alignment and regionalisation process, it might be useful to review afresh the existing CoP practices and processes. UNDP, through BDP's Knowledge Sharing Team, is currently supporting 15 UN agencies to improve their knowledge sharing and networking capacity. BDP's knowledge sharing team has been building relationships with other UN agencies since 2003, providing both technical support and advisory services. This support includes inter alia: replicating the UNDP Community of Practice (CoP) and Network Approach; Support to UNCTs; Inter-Agency Collaboration; and Advisory Support for Knowledge Management Strategies. Thus far, UNDP's model of knowledge networks and CoPs has now been replicated by ten agencies. The main objective of this effort has been to enhance the capacity of the UN family to strengthen knowledge management at the agency level while at the same time promote new and innovative approaches to inter-agency knowledge sharing and networking. This has placed UNDP in a good position to play a leadership role on knowledge management and CoP strengthening process within the UN System.

3. CoP IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE PRACTICE

UNDP continues to widen and sharpen its focus on democratic Governance. UNDP is one of the largest providers of democratic governance technical cooperation globally, spending over \$5.13 billion worldwide in the period 2004-2007; and all but three UNDP country programmes were engaged in promoting democratic governance. Overall, 80 percent of resources were spent on public administration reform and anti-corruption, decentralization and local governance, and electoral systems. In 2007, UNDP expenditures in democratic governance amounted to \$1.286 billion, registering a slight decline (3 percent) from the previous year's level of \$1.342 billion. Notwithstanding, over-all expenditure figures show that democratic governance remains the largest priority area for UNDP development cooperation, comprising 41 percent of its overall portfolio.

The UNDP Democratic Governance Group (DGG) supports the Communities of Practice in delivering these programmes.² The Democratic Governance Practice Network (DGP-Net) connects an even wider group of approximately 2000 practitioners worldwide. The DGP-net also acts as a bridge between the DGG and the broader democratic governance Community of Practice.

Over the past years, the DGG hosted a number of global and regional CoP meetings to build and strengthen its CoPs, and to advance its thematic causes and sub-practice focuses. While the objectives of most of the meetings were clear, the follow-up agenda often lacks clarity and strategic vision to sustain the momentum created through CoP meetings and related resource intensive preparations. As a result, some of the agenda agreed at past meetings remain unimplemented. Lack of human and financial resources also prohibited CoP leaders and members to follow-up planned initiatives. All these pose significant challenges for sustaining follow-up programmes for any CoP meeting and/or CoP strengthening process. Solid preparations in line with corporate priorities and community needs and demands are critical for the success of any CoP meeting. Therefore, it is critical to do it right from the very beginning of the process.

²The DGG is a decentralized group of about 58 democratic governance specialists, including policy advisers, research/policy analysts, and programme managers and/or advisers.

V. INITIATING A CoP

Communities of Practice have previously been thought of as coming into existence when people interested in a common work-related area or in an avocation feel a need to share what they know and to learn from others. Professional associations, groups of development practitioners, and skilled craft guilds are examples of work-related Communities of Practice. Avocational examples range from communities of quilters to communities of rowers. In the past few years e-mail, electronic discussion groups, and electronic chat rooms have facilitated the development of Communities of Practice. Regardless of the mode of interaction, the traditional notion of a Community of Practice is that it emerges from a work-related or interest-related field and that its members volunteer to join. But Communities of Practice are not just celebrations of common interest. They focus on practical aspects of a practice, everyday problems, new tools, developments in the field, things that work and don't. So people participate because the community provides value. Community members frequently turn to each other to help solve technical problems.



Communities of Practice are ideal vehicles for leveraging tacit knowledge because they enable person-to-person interaction and engage a whole group in advancing their field of practice. As a result, they can spread the insight from that collaborative thinking across the whole organisation.

However, if a community can't get their act together and organize themselves to keep going, then it's a non starter in the first place. Usually there needs to be a core of at least 3-4 people who just keep digging away at it and continue to exchange. Others will watch and join. A Face to Face meeting and/or virtual meeting of such core group is critical to sow the seed of the CoP. Face-to-face contact is important to create the trust and rapport that communities need to develop effectively. By funding face to face events – travel mostly - organisations can enable that interaction. Community sponsors should also assist in supporting the communities by budgeting for those items not covered by the basic infrastructure costs. Community sponsors should also assist in supporting the communities by budgeting for those items not covered by the basic infrastructure costs. However the present guidelines, as indicated, have focused primarily on Community of Practice strengthening process.

VI. CoP MEETINGS: LESSONS LEARNED

With such a large community (i.e., DG CoP etc.), it is important to have clear guidelines on how core members are selected and who gets invited to global and or regional CoP meetings. Face-to-face contact is important to create the trust and rapport that communities need to develop effectively. By funding face to face events – travel mostly - organisations can enable that interaction. Also given the sheer size of the meeting, it's important to design it in such a way that whatever cannot be shared or accomplished virtually, is done so at the face-to-face meetings.

Review of the responses and documents confirms that there is an increasing tendency of branding any meeting (i.e., Focal Points Meeting, Advisory Board/Committee Meeting, Strategic Planning Workshop, Thematic Training Workshop etc.) as CoP meeting. Some practitioners often confuse electronic network with broader Community of Practice.³ Community members referred to a number of useful lessons:

1. **Pre-meeting mapping/survey and consultation:** A pre-meeting survey and/or mapping among the intended beneficiaries will help identify the needs of a particular CoP better. Through consultations before and during the meeting/workshop, participants were made aware of their role as core group members.
2. **Generating ideas:** A useful tool to help organize the agenda and issues to be addressed within a CoP meeting is an e-consultation/virtual roundtable discussion among targeted group of practitioners on the general topic of the CoP.
3. **Balancing the agenda:** It is important to balance between substantive discussions (including with leading external experts), networking, and community/process-centred talks. Most meetings tend to concentrate too much either on process or on substance.

³ Indeed an e-network is one significant among a variety of tools used by Communities of Practice to communicate regularly. While a very important tool, e-networks which do not have the five features noted above should not be referred to as a Community of Practice. The term CoP should be used as consistently as possible to avoid confusion.

4. **Objectives:** The objectives of CoP meetings should be clarified from the beginning. It helps consolidating the basis of such events, and its targeted constituency. For example, the objectives of the 2004 Global Practice Meeting (Public Administration Reform-PAR Sub-practice) were specified in the following terms:

"The objectives of the Global Practice Meeting held by the Democratic Governance Group of the Bureau of Development Policy in Bratislava, Slovakia, between April 19th and April 22nd, 2004 were to:

- *Bring together a core group of UNDP practitioners from country, sub-regional, regional and global levels, as well as a limited number of senior practitioners and academics from and politicians with hands-on experience of PAR programmes, for face-to-face dialogue to gain an overview of the sub practice, and strengthen interaction as a global community.*
- *Examine the approaches proposed and niche identified for UNDP in the Practice Note against practical experience and latest thinking, and strengthen a next edition of the note based on this experience.*
- *Build a common understanding and consensus behind the approaches and niche for UNDP detailed in the Practice Note, as well as explore the implications of these for UNDP practitioners in the field."*⁴

5. **Outputs that Matter:** Identifying practical, demand driven outputs⁵ is critical for a successful follow-up strategy. Some examples of CoP outputs include, among others, mapping of practice resources & experts, codification of lessons, success stories, & good practices, initiation of workspaces on the internet, formulation of manuals and how-to-guides, etc. A practice approach is critical to ensure that knowledge produced is "shared" rather than "shelved".

⁴ Summary of proceedings can be viewed at:
<http://www.ecissurf.org/files/pubadmin/Practice%20Meeting%20Report%20Summary.doc>

⁵ Often outputs are planned inline with practice group/thematic/SL policy Advisers annual work plan. While it is important to ensure link CoP meeting with practice/sub-practice agenda, actual needs of the community should be prioritized in determining potential outputs of a CoP meeting/CoP process.

6. **Community Interaction and Partnership:** Examples of meetings are in abundance where people are asked to make one presentation after another to showcase their good practice and after the 15th power point presentation, people just start tuning out. There should be a period for real peer support or what is known as peer-assist, where someone has a major problem and needs advice from the group. Before the meeting, the organisers could ask people to submit requests for peer-assist and organize small clinics around which people really feel they have either directly benefited from the advice of peers or feel they have contributed to someone's real and current problem. It will help tailoring a CoP meeting towards participants' specific needs, and hence increases both the relevance of the meeting and the chances of longer term impact. It is also an excellent way of extracting more tacit knowledge from participants.

Another idea would be to have some discussion and support for someone who wants to replicate another's good practice. Perhaps there is an opportunity here to introduce seed funding for replication of good practices -it could be in the form of a Request for Proposal for partnership from the two parties willing to provide technical support and the one wishing to replicate an idea. This could be a knowledge partnership or 'partnership fair' session towards the end of the CoP meeting. Latin America has excellent examples of knowledge and partnership fairs.

7. **Full-time Facilitation:** Face to face meetings can not be done as a side job. The process could be led by UNDP manager or policy advisor, but needs to be backed up by a full time coordinator/facilitator who ideally has (a) relevant UNDP experience, and (b) a thorough understanding about the substance and the process. The facilitator should be able to guide everyone through a community-building process. S/he can help obtain consensus on priorities and next steps for the CoP, and can manage group dynamic, energy and expectations. As very few people in UNDP can actually do this, professional facilitators or someone with these unique set of skills and known to the community should be assigned for this.

8. Linking CoP with Capacity Development and Learning:

Members emphasised the need for integrated capacity development and learning approach in CoP building, strengthening, and follow-up processes. This has also been confirmed in a recent Oslo Governance Center (OGC) led training needs assessment where DGP-Net members contributed significantly.⁶ As communities developed, they have taken on greater significance in their organisations, truly stewarding bodies of knowledge critical to the organisation. At the same time they have assumed many of the characteristics of their organisations and are beginning to influence the organisations' approach to learning and knowledge sharing. This will also contribute to the capturing of tacit knowledge. However, some of the CoP members advocated for opening this up for government counterparts on a pilot basis. They also cautioned against focusing too much on internal capacity building.

9. Keeping the Members Engaged: Keeping the members of the community engaged in collective initiatives and processes is a challenging task. Community participation, even when very valuable, can easily be surpassed by more pressing tasks. It is important to address this institutionally, i.e., encouraging communities by allowing staff time to attend community meetings, funding community events, giving prominence

6 In this context, an online survey was sent to 6,000 UNDP staff and had 809 respondents at all levels. Some interesting findings include the following:

- Respondents indicated that there is a strong need for training in PAR. Of the 17 thematic areas listed, Monitoring and Evaluation for DG is indicated as the area where most would like to have training, followed by Decentralization, Local Governance and R/U Development (2nd), Capacity Development for DG (3rd), Governance, Conflict Prevention, Peace Building and Security (4th), and Anti-Corruption/ PAR (5th).
- With regard to the level of training required, in the Arab States, Africa and Asia Pacific regions, most respondents indicated that they would like to receive training in AC/PAR at basic/awareness level, while in Europe and the CIS and Latin America, most respondents would prefer practitioner level training in this area.
- Respondents who perform senior management functions indicated that they would like to receive training at the following levels, respectively: Strategic level (38%), Expert level (18%), Practitioner level (20%), and Basic/awareness level (23%). At the same time, those who perform advisory functions indicated their preferences as follows: Strategic level (16%); Expert level (29%), Practitioner level (33 %) and Basic/Awareness level (21%). Programme and project staff training level preferences, on the other hand, are as follows: Strategic (9%), Expert (21%), Practitioner (33%), Basic /Awareness (37%). A strong preference for face-to-face training (47%) vis-a-vis online training.

to relevant network updates/bulletins. In fact, management team can address this issue by integrating community participation into their planning and budgeting activity. “Web 2.0” tools including social networking, wiki, blog etc. could facilitate the process further.

10. Application of Knowledge Management (KM) Methods:

Inclusion of KM Buzz session, Knowledge Café etc. in the CoP meeting improves the efficacy of the business process. For example a knowledge café is a type of business meeting or organisational workshop which aims to provide an open and creative conversation on a topic of mutual interest to surface collective knowledge, share ideas and insights, and gain a deeper understanding of the subject and the issues involved. Application such KM methods help in several ways:

- a) to gain mutual understanding of a complex issue
- b) to gain a deeper understanding of other people's perspectives
- c) to gain a deeper understanding of one's own views and thinking process
- d) to flush out issues which need airing & exploring
- e) to help build a consensus around an issue or topic.



VII. GOOD PRACTICES TO STRENGTHEN CoP

Commitment to next steps following a successful CoP meeting is important but not enough. A CoP must be given the time and space to evolve into a community of committed individuals who jointly assume responsibility for a given issue area and/or task. Further development of the CoP would require additional resources and the availability of, at least, a part-time facilitator.

It is important to engage the CoP members in reviewing and evaluating the preparatory processes and the meeting as well. The draft UNDP CoP Guidelines suggested the following indicative questions:

- Has the CoP improved service delivery to COs and partners/stakeholders?
- Has the CoP increased UNDP's impact on policy?
- Has the CoP established UNDP's leadership and strengthened its advisory capacity?
- Has the CoP increased collaboration between and among Regional Centers and COs as well as other stakeholders?
- Has the CoP provided meaningful participation of marginalized communities?
- To what extent has the CoP helped to better align Regional Programs with needs of COs?

CRITICAL FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL FOLLOW-UP STRATEGY:

1. **Shared Vision:** The vision of the CoP and relevant follow-up activities need to be developed in a participatory manner ensuring ownership of the participating community members.
2. **Well-defined Agenda for Follow-up Action:** Any CoP should invest time to articulate its follow-up actions/agenda for action. Formation of a dedicated working group/taskforce to work on this and engage the members better during the meeting has been identified as an effective strategy and good practice. The agenda should be time-bound with level of prioritization attached to it. The agenda should specify its short-term/immediate, medium-term, and long-term focus. An example of detailed, somewhat practical agenda can be cited from the 2004 Global Practice Meeting on Electoral Systems and Processes:

Global Practice Meeting on Electoral Systems and Processes 2004 (Manila):

Recommended Follow-up Steps

- Maintain the network of contacts active and in permanent touch
- Maintain “the momentum”; share conclusions w/COs and bring to the attention of Resident Representatives (RRs)
- Keep the network going via regular e-mails and create an extranet for non-UNDP staff
- Carry out an e-vote to decide on the priorities for next year
- Focused e-discussion/survey to decide concretely what the practice should do
- Discussions of meeting be incorporated on strategy documents, including update of Practice Note
- Further refinement of the Practice Note which is already a useful piece of guidance
- Contribute to the next revision of PN including making note of use of UNDP's UNVs as a best practice, and adding more in text to clarity of EAD's mandate, role, etc. in relation to UNDP
- A brief note on what actions will be taken, by whom following the meeting, and some indication of the timeline for launching the revised Practice Note or other tools suggested by participants
- Continue/finalize discussion on engaging with political parties with a conclusion/set of clear recommendations to practitioners; mobilize a selected group (BDP/NY, RCs, COs) to create a task force to carry the debate further; the finality should be a Knowledge Management product – a Practice Note
- Continue discussions started through e-mail; regional meetings under regional programme to discuss regional issues and implement regional programmes; identify electoral issues through a bottom up approach (country, regional, global) so that the next meeting becomes more of a “summit”
- Meet periodically so as not to lose focus; cluster these meetings that people from one region could come up with the “do’s” and “don’ts” which are region specific and can be systematically applied to country situations
- Formation of a Core Practice Group; e-Newsletter at least every two months; regional sub-practice meeting
- Follow up with meeting participants on the development of tools
- Regional meetings and elections “by type” activities should be promoted
- Getting conclusions drawn; documents on net; participants list with e-mail

- Establish a Community of Practice; inviting external partners like IDEA, IFES, NDI made the workshop interesting and useful; This partnership must continue and further strengthened
- Involve practitioners and SURFs; make a clear agenda for internal and external experts; work at short notice on one or two concrete initiatives to establish the Community of Practice; use more MSI for electoral support
- Develop a SWAT Team for electoral support – package info for the UNDP Administrator to “sell” to donors with calendar of elections needs on the ground
- Focus on short-/long-term support for elections and election-related capacity building – the most effective areas for support in each case and the governance implications of long-term support
- Issues raised on rules and procedures governing UNDP’s involvement in electoral activities (as specified in the PN), and their impact on effectiveness of our support as well as the need for improving existing mechanisms – tools, networks – should be addressed
- Create a website with all documentation related to meeting; invite participants to contribute election-related docs to the corporate knowledge based in this area; set up a WG composed of practice members to suggest (a) how to further improve the PN, and (b) new areas for policy analysis by UNDP at the corporate level in the electoral field; send out the final draft ACE prodoc to practice members for review and comments
- On UNDP’s niche + on looking into sustainable electoral assistance/processes so that post-conflict countries and LDCs can conduct elections with minimal cost and outside support; Review of how points raised in first meeting was implemented/not implemented
- Interesting ideas raised on the final day deserve specific follow up; More important than content is the process: how to move the ideas forward: One way is thru the Practice Note, but that is limited; Perhaps a core practice group of less than 12 can serve as advisors to the practice?⁷

3. Shared Responsibility: Communities are held together by people who care about the community. Therefore, a core team of practitioners, identified through carefully balanced selection process, should be formed to carry forward the CoP agenda. A good mix of national and regional colleagues needs to be ensured. Finding a well-respected community member

⁷ For further details, please visit:

<http://www.undp.org/governance/eventsites/electoral-manila/>

to act as coordinator of such team is critical to sustain the momentum.

4. **Giving Community Leaders Adequate Time and Training to Lead:** When community leaders try to lead in their “spare time” community leadership can easily be squeezed off their plate by other more pressing needs. It is important to make this a part of their core official responsibility, not additional responsibility. Leading a community is different from leading a team or being an individual contributor. While time consuming, the trainings help community leaders understand their role – not just how to work the technology – and makes community leadership clearly distinct from team leadership. Training should include the key activities of community leadership; networking, facilitating meetings and influencing the organisation.
5. **Identifying Champions:** Identifying champions is critical for achieving CoP objectives and/or maintaining sustainability. Champions lead the process effectively by example and, add substantive value to the knowledge sharing process.
6. **Pre-allocated Budget:** Resources should be allocated for follow-up activities as part of the CoP event budget. Communities are not free, hence it is important to give them the financial support required to interact, think together, and solve real problems.⁸
7. **Enhanced Peer to Peer Interaction:** Communities that have an impact on organisational and member performance do more than share knowledge generally. They actively support member participation in developing practices. Hosting an annual contest on specific techniques can add value to customers. The idea of an interactive on-line platform to facilitate CoP-type networking within several professional networks that UNDP is currently facilitating is worth pursuing. Such a platform may have potential to stimulate more peer-to-peer interaction.

⁸ As an example Asia-Pacific Rights and Justice Initiative (AP-A2J) was a significant undertaking in both human (total of 2 1/2 work years) and financial resource terms (USD 230,000) at the expected finalization of the present stage in mid-2004.

8. **Advisory Groups/Stand-by Team of Practitioners:** Establishment of a stand-by team of practitioners and thematic experts could function as a sounding board for potential programming and collaboration opportunities.
9. **Solving Routine Challenges:** The extent to which community members see the community as a resource for solving everyday work challenges also correlates with high individual and organisational impact. Sometimes communities turn their meetings into a series of technical presentations. Our research clearly shows that this is not what drives members to participate. Solving everyday work problems is. Leaders should keep their community focused on genuinely useful discussions, not presentations.
10. **Learning & Capacity Development:** Learning and knowledge sharing activities should not be held as 'one-off' events – valuable only in and of themselves – but should rather be tied to existing business processes addressing real problems or opportunities at country and regional level. As UNDP focuses more on improving knowledge work, real improvement will come from understanding real practice. Communities are the groups that can genuinely understand which practices apply in which circumstances.⁹
11. **Planning Global and/or Regional Outreach:** CoPs could be organized not only as an opportunity to get together and discuss issues of common interest, but as much as possible also to plan global-regional outreach of UNDP within that Service Line, try to align financial resources to the promotion and achievement of key knowledge products to be prepared collectively, etc. The challenge here is that the system of budgeting does not help very much on this, as well as the

⁹Through these communities peer learning has become a product line of the World Bank Institute (WBI), enhancing the training WBI conducts. Peer learning as a product is emerging in several other industries as well, notably pharmaceuticals. Perhaps this is part of a larger shift in how we collectively see the locus of expertise, from concentrated in a few individuals or firms to distributed throughout a network. As we move to a networked view of the locus of expertise, it opens the potential for more unexpected forums of global collaboration. For further details please visit WBI site at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/WBI/0,,pagePK:208996~theSitePK:213799,00.html>

system of allocation of tasks between HQ and regional offices. But it will be useful to think about this. However, this certainly demands full support from the senior management and practice leadership. With the regional centres now fully institutionalized through the regionalisation process, it becomes all the more critical to establish closer links between Practice groups at HQ level, Regional Centres, and Regional Programmes, irrespective of the division of labor. It is just operationally and organisationally necessary to be clear about those linkages between HQ and the regional centres.

- 12. Reward and Recognition:** Institutional arrangement for incentives is an important element to continue and enhance the level of engagement of the community members. It highlights the things the organisation feels are important and demonstrates that the time and energy people spend sharing knowledge “counts” in their performance and career. UNDP CO colleagues are usually pulled into many divergent directions at the same time, and often don’t have the time to properly focus on, and contribute to the CoP. Additionally, many of them are members of many CoPs and e-networks. However, they may be interested because of the following considerations:

- They get knowledge and information faster or exclusive
- They learn things and prepare themselves for future jobs
- It makes their present UN/UNDP job easier
- They are involved in ‘corporate/regional’ initiative
- They become members of something like an exclusive network
- They enhance their CV and fast track their career
- They make themselves a good reputation as experts
- They meet interesting people and widen their personal network

Such incentives could be in the form of professional recognition, programmatic opportunities, fellowship, training/learning opportunities, career progression etc.

- 13. Collaborative Tools:** Use of a range of tools and technologies to encourage community members to contribute and share

information and experiences is critical. Innovative opportunities should be promoted to allow members work together to design or implement strategic initiatives and interventions. Use of interactive web portal, wiki, blog etc. could also be considered. Typically high performing communities need the following functions:

- discussion forums
- document libraries
- effective search
- expertise/experts locator
- on-demand teleconferencing

14. **Virtual Collaboration:** With development issues increasingly cutting across national borders, the agencies are leveraging a common set of virtual tools to deliver connected communities of practitioners, access to expertise, and knowledge resources across geographically dispersed offices. For example, UNDP Regional Centres in Asia-Pacific have developed the new Solution Networks of Asia-Pacific (SNAP) portal -'a people-connecting web-based tool' for collaboration and knowledge sharing. The SNAP portal is based on Microsoft's SharePoint 2007. It has been provided for free to the regional centres and the project has also benefited from free in-kind support from Microsoft.

VIII. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As part of organisational development strategy, the long-term CoP strengthening agenda should consider the following critical trends and concerns:

1. **Addressing Constraints in Global-Regional CoP and Networking Relations:** Establishing coherence among global, regional, and, national/local level CoPs and networks is important specially in the context of recent BDP alignment (2008). Relations with Regional Bureaus and SURFs/Service Centers need to be articulated to ensure development effectiveness.
2. **Meta-networking:** As suggested in the 2007 report of the UNDP/BDP MetaNetworking Task Force, UNDP should promote meta-networking¹⁰ to enhance knowledge partnership and connectivity, and, deepen its knowledge grounding with appropriate regional and national/local inputs. If planned strategically, this will also go along way to promote South-South cooperation and capacity development. Meta-networking has the potential to connect like minded CoPs around a common agenda.
3. **Replicate and Scale-up High Impact Catalytic KM Initiatives:** It will be important to leverage successful KM initiatives i.e., tangible products and services, to which additional support will grant greater visibility, secure wider adoption, and, therefore multiply impact. Such replication and collaboration will strengthen the CoP and increase its value to its members.
4. **Integrated Plan of Action:** An integrated plan of action is required with some quick wins that can deliver more immediate benefits (e.g. address specific suggestions shared by CoP members for improvements in products and services as per the Benchmarking Survey results and the UNDP HQ Products and Services Survey recommendations. Other issues such as sponsor engagement and helping to make sure networks

¹⁰ A meta-network is a non-hierarchical lattice or web of networks that are connected or linked together through electronic communication (through the facilitators of the respective networks and/or CoPs), for the purpose of sharing knowledge and resources, collaborating for efficiency and synergy, and, effectiveness.

address business issues will take more time and work to engage senior management. Consistent and continuous follow-up of CoP agenda developed in a participatory manner is critical.

5. **Promoting 'One UN' Agenda:** As mandated in the Strategic Plan, UNDP Networks need to be focusing on UN-wide knowledge partnership agenda with pragmatic work plan. In this regard, the lessons learned from UNDP collaboration with more than 15 UN agencies on Knowledge Management and CoP building process could be very useful. The Knowledge Management Partnership of the UN Country Team in India has successfully introduced a suite of knowledge-sharing services – “Solution Exchange” – creating Communities of Practice (CoPs) of development practitioners, convened by UNCT agencies and organized around MDG-related development topics. Members come from all organisations – government, NGOs, development partners, private sector, and academia – to interact on an ongoing basis, build trust and strengthen their identity as a group. As a UN initiative, it offers a free, impartial space where all partners are welcome members of the community.
6. **Social Networking:** It used to be that people joined associations because it was a way of meeting like-minded people and getting help, facilities, information and other things difficult or costly to organise for themselves. These days it is much easier to find people and resources online, and to mix and match these assets into project teams, Communities of Practice, and informal networks. That means social networking is going to impact on nonprofit and professional membership. It is, however, still unclear how far-reaching the social networking impact would be on the existing and future CoPs.
7. **Teamworks:** Teamworks is a new system of record and distribution for knowledge produced by national and international staff including consultants and CTAs, projects and programmes, UNCTs, COs, RSCs, functional units, and through thematic practices and centres' experts and advisors. Teamworks will enable dynamic, interactive and responsive

content management, social networking and communication mechanisms. With regard to social networking, Teamworks will provide a common integrated solution for managing communities. The benefits will include the following:

- Decentralized management of communities will enable generation of new communities on demand. Users will be able to create bottom-up, ad-hoc communities on demand and ad hoc and time-bound communities can be formed rapidly to respond to crisis situations.
- Community ownership, membership and participation will be transparent as all “public/open” communities will be listed. Users will have the ability to look in on discussions without subscribing and easy access to view and join existing communities and to manage member subscription. Users will also be able to invite other colleagues and partners to join a community.
- From community exchanges users will be able to access the “People” profiles associated with participants.
- Management will be able to analyze demand for new communities and topics of discussion



IX. CONCLUSION

Communities of Practice present a peculiar challenge for UNDP. They have always been part of the informal structure of organisations. They are organic. They grow and thrive as their focus and dynamics engage community members. But to make them really inclusive and relevant, they need to be nurtured, followed-up, and validated. They need a carefully balanced support structure to grow and prosper. Due to lack of experience in developing organic organisational element like CoP, the process proves to be particularly delicate in UNDP. Too much support and they lose their appeal to community members. Too little and they dry up. The challenges they pose and the factors that help them flourish are different from the factors most of us as organisational leaders, and managers are used to working with. In the context of UNDP/BDP while it is important to integrate knowledge management skills into policy advisers' profiles, deployment of dedicated CoP expert/facilitator with deeper understanding of knowledge management is critical to overcome existing knowledge gap.

X. ANNEXES

1. SELECTED COMMENTS FROM THE PRACTITIONERS

During the process of drafting the Guidance Note, many interesting and thought provoking comments were received:

Thematic CoP & DG Practice Meeting

- *Annual retreats/practice meetings should be organized so as to facilitate a productive exchange among Policy Advisers working under the same Service Lines (SLs) or outcomes. It is an opportunity that should not be undermined. In my view unfortunately in Montauk and in Bratislava, the agenda of the meetings were organized without sufficient consideration of the fact that Policy Advisers (PAs) get together practically only in that occasion. The challenge is to ensure that the time allocated for that purpose within the Annual Retreats is appropriately used. These meetings are not necessarily a CoP meeting, but they are a proxy to it. They are useful and very relevant.*
- *From their first inception, there had always been a dichotomy built into the concept of Communities of Practice. Organisations saw them as stewards of the key knowledge assets and core competencies of the organisation. Yet, most organisations allocated far fewer resources and management attention to developing and sustaining these communities than to the organisations' physical assets. Now many organisations seem to be recognizing the importance of devoting more attention and resources to sustaining the organisation's core knowledge – and the organisational groups who do so, like Communities of Practice (CoPs).*
- *The issue is that CoPs in the past were associated to Service Lines (SLs). How they will be organized in the future around "outcomes and/or"? Or will they still be representing the traditional SLs.*

CoP role vis-à-vis Learning and Capacity Development

- *There is an unfortunate tendency, whenever any new focus area for programming is proposed, to demand capacity development in that particular area for UNDP staff. I believe that UNDP, for the*

most part, should leave it to staff to develop their own knowledge and professional competence in areas where they are required to work. As a corporate entity, we should be assisting, to the best of our abilities, developing countries. We should not detract from that obligation by excessively investing time and resources on 'self-improvement' in order that we might, eventually, become better equipped to serve our clients better. Our clients need to be served NOW. They don't buy 'infant industry' arguments in the competitive world of development assistance. There are far too many 'Communities of Practice' already. I believe that we may be fast approaching the point of diminishing returns in the use of this modality.

- *Staffs in COs are usually too busy to read/follow any new developments that are not linked to their immediate work plan. There is a lot of research showing the advantages for organisations to continually invest in the knowledge/skills of their staff and return on investments (ROI). What we need in my view is better, targeted, focused learning events that make use of the expertise we have and also scan globally to learn about what others are doing, and how we can use it in our programmes, rather than the type of event which is mostly structured around PPT presentations with little follow-up*
- *I do believe that CoPs are good mechanisms for knowledge sharing and knowledge management. Furthermore, they could be - if run in a transformational manner - become strong mechanisms of enhancing leadership skills. The more widely open such CoP to national counterparts the more it would have a transformational and empowering impact. Furthermore, such a CoP needs to be a platform for sharing tangible resources on the "how" not the "what" such as experts in specific field, good practice and lessons learned on processes of partnership between society and the anti corruption institutional machinery.*
- *We should be careful not to mix up apples and oranges in a CoP meeting setting. At CO level, most if not all projects have budget lines to offer training of some kind to public officials/government counterparts, whose needs, background, motivation and incentives can be quite different from UNDP programme officers*

even though they may be working toward the same goals. The other thing is that CoPs are internal to UNDP, and we should be able to speak freely about the challenges we face at F2F events with our peers, which would not be possible if counterparts are there too. Therefore, I don't think that mixing the two target groups (UNDP staff and Government counterparts) is always a good idea. An exception to this I think, are the types of learning events, such as conferences or roundtables, where new cutting edge knowledge is presented, and that also function as a good opportunity for UNDP staff to create rapport with national counterparts, which helps when they go back home and have to work together.

Follow-up to CoP Meetings

- *As UNDP focuses more on improving knowledge work, real improvement will come from understanding real practice. Communities are the groups that can genuinely understand which practices apply in which circumstances.*
- *A CoP cannot exist just for the purpose of existing, in other words it cannot be exclusively self-centred (on its internal processes) - it needs to have some shared goal that goes beyond its domain, produce some outputs for a broader audience. There are excellent examples with CoPs producing high-impact knowledge products.*
- *We have not had an official CoP meeting in the elections area since the Manila meeting in 2004. Nonetheless, it seems that products continue to emerge from that meeting. The meeting suggested a number of recommendations for follow up. Many were pursued over the last three years, including the Political Parties Handbook and now a draft Implementation Guide that combines together many of the practical guidance mentioned in the recommendations on execution, implementation, partnerships, capacity development and other areas.*

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Selected Global Community of Practice (CoP) Meeting Workspace & Reports

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- Community of Practice Meeting on Governance and Conflict Prevention, Kathmandu (November 2006)
- Community of Practice Meeting on Public Administration Reform, Bratislava (April 2004)
- Community of Practice Meeting on Electoral Systems and Processes, Manila (November 2004)
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